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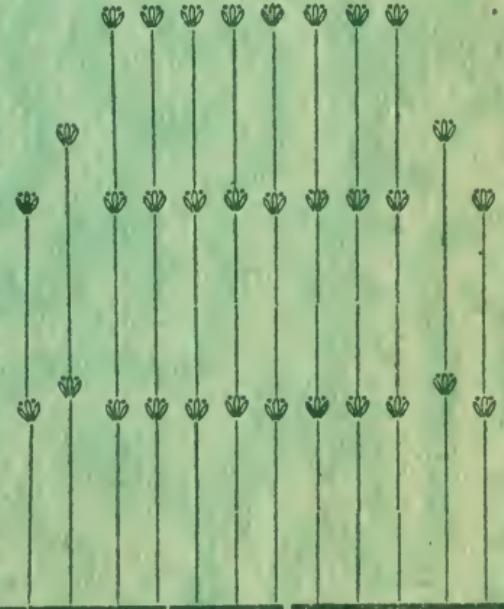
Eugene Field



By

. . . Clara Banta . .

The
Story
of
His
Life
For
Children



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EUGENE FIELD

THE

STORY OF HIS LIFE FOR CHILDREN

BY

CLARA BANTA

A. T. SWEET, PUBLISHER

KANSAS CITY, MO.

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PREFACE.

The purpose of this little volume is twofold ; first, to place within the hands of the children a story of this sweet singer of the lays of childhood, in so simple a form that it can be read and understood by them while yet in the lower grades, with the hope that it may fill them with the desire to read and to memorize the poems of their own loved laureate ; and, second, to assist the teacher in the preparation of memorial exercises for the observance of Field Day in the public schools.

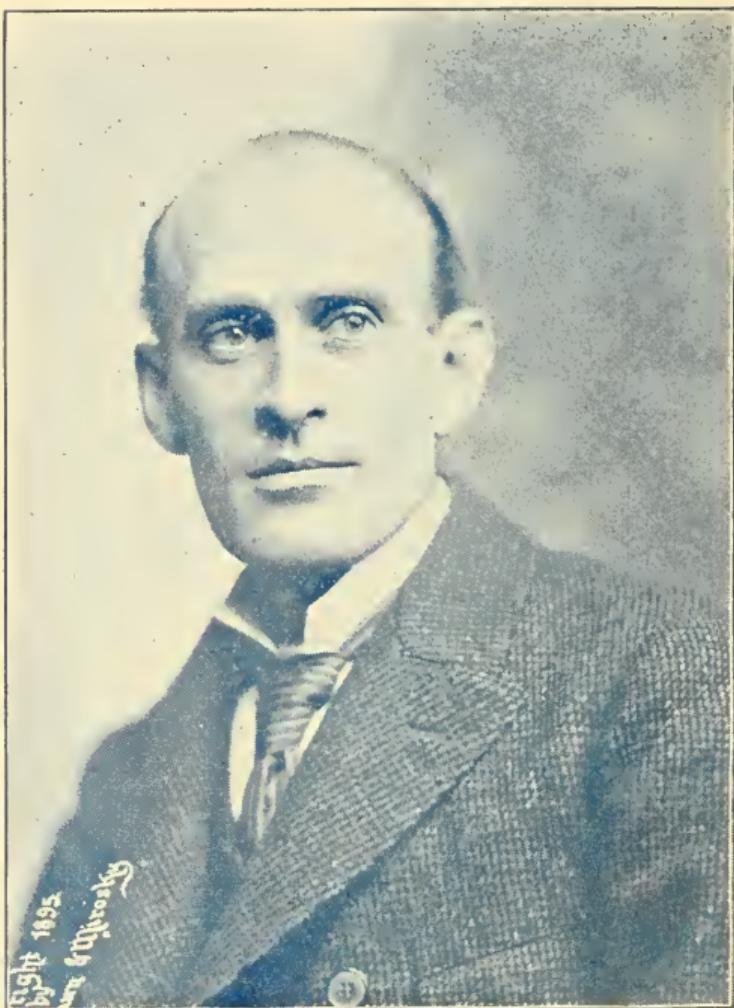
If this little story creates a love for
Eugene Field in the breast of one little
child, or in any way lightenes the burden
of one weary teacher, it will not have
been written in vain. C. B.

Kansas City, Missouri,
December 8, 1898.

Dedicated to
The Boys and the Girls
Who are Helping Build
A Monument to
The Memory of
Eugene Field

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EUGENE FIELD

By Permission of Mrs. Field.

Eugene Field

I.

BOYHOOD.

“Listen, my children, and you shall hear”
not

“Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,”

BUT of a man who is called the Children's Poet. A man whom all of you love, because he wrote verses for little people.

No other poet ever made such beautiful, simple rhymes for the willing, listening ears of childhood. No other man was ever loved by half so many childish hearts.

Would you not like to know the name of this friend of yours? It is Eugene Field, the Children's Laureate.

On September 2, 1850, in the city of St. Louis, there was born to Roswell Martin Field and his wife, Frances Reed Field, a little son, whom they named Eugene.

When this little boy was but six years old the dear mother died, and Eugene and his brother, Roswell, were taken to New England where they lived with their cousin, Miss Mary Field French, in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Here in this old college town he spent his quiet, happy childhood. When nine years old he and his brother went to their grandmother's country home in Vermont. It was Eugene's first visit to the country,

and how he enjoyed it! He said afterwards that his love for nature dates from that visit.

He must have looked at everything very carefully, for he has told us of so many things in nature—of the birds, the flowers, the trees, the toads, and the bees—in a poem that tells of his boyhood days.

Read the poem, “Long Ago,” in his Little Book of Western Verse, and you will see things in nature you never saw before, although you may have looked at them many times.

The boys remained here in the country for seven months ; but the days were not as full of happiness for the grandmother as they were for Eugene and Roswell, for sometimes they sorely tried the dear old lady’s patience.

She was very anxious for Eugene to be a preacher when he became a man, so she hired him to write sermons when he was a little boy, giving him ten cents for every one he wrote. Eugene was at that time fully persuaded to become a preacher; but whether it was the regard for his grandmother's wishes, or the love of the ten cents, we do not know. One of these juvenile sermons was kept and is now in possession of his family. It is a very solemn and awful plea for wicked people to become better.

He was also paid five dollars for learning the Ten Commandments. He did not then enjoy studying the Bible. But when a man he said, "I would not exchange for any amount of money the acquaintance with the Bible that was drummed into me when I was a boy."

He did enjoy, however, learning pieces to speak and then reciting them to his friends. Some of his favorites were, Longfellow's "Psalm of Life," and the last part of "The Building of the Ship," Drake's "American Flag," Bryant's "Death of the Flowers," Mrs. Hemans' "Landing of the Pilgrims" and Halleck's "Marco Bozzaris."

He was very kind to every thing, but especially so to animals. He made pets of all he could get except the horse, for he was always afraid of this good servant of mankind. His brother has told us that every friendless dog or homeless cat always found in him a champion and friend.

He loved to call his pets by fanciful, unheard-of names, and imagined each one had a language of its own which he

understood. He would talk to them in this peculiar tongue, and felt they knew what he said.

Caring for the poultry was part of his work. Once when among them he stepped on a little chick and killed it. He rushed to the house, threw himself down on the sofa, and cried as if his heart would break. He was a true "Band of Mercy" boy, even if there was no band then for him to join. His kindness toward animals remained with him through life. When he had children of his own he taught them to be good to dumb creatures, often saying to them, "Remember the pussy and the puppy think you are a great, big giant."

In their New England home they had a dog whose name was Fido, but 'Gene

called him Dooley. His pity for this pet suffering from heat and fleas called forth his first rhyme.

It was not very pretty poetry, but it was quite good for a boy to write, and it shows us what a kind hearted little fellow he was. A boy who loves animals and treats them kindly never grows up to be a bad man.

Years afterward Mr. Field wrote about Dooley in a poem called "The Bench-Legged Fyce." Would you not like to read it?

One Christmas, while the boys were still in Amherst, they had a Christmas tree. After the presents were taken off, Eugene and Roswell planted the tree at the corner of Sunset Avenue and Amity Street. Eugene never forgot it, and

many years afterward in talking with a friend he said he hoped sometime to return to the old town and put on the tree an inscription something like this:

“Pause, busy traveler, and give a thought to the happy days of two western boys who lived in old New England, and make resolve to render the boyhood near you happier and brighter.”

II.

SCHOOL LIFE.

EUGENE remained in Amherst with his kind hearted, motherly cousin till he was about nineteen years of age.

During this time he had been sent to school in Amherst, and had also spent a year in Williams College, which is in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He should have entered college two years earlier, but could not on account of poor health.

In the summer of 1869 his father died, and he went with his guardian, Dr. Burgess, to Galesburg, Illinois, where he attended Knox College for a year. The next year he went to Missouri and

entered the State University at Columbia, where his brother was then in school.

In speaking of his school life here, he once said to a friend, "Columbia was an old slave-holding town, but I liked it. I've got a streak of Southern feeling in me."

While in school at Columbia, he was not a very good student; but he was a great favorite with the young men of the school. He helped them with the college paper, was the author of their songs, and a leader in all their fun and frolics. Sometimes this fun was carried too far and became real mischief.

Dr. Reed, the president of the university at this time, had a fine carriage horse of which he was very proud. One night Eugene Field roached this horse's mane

and shaved its tail. There was a white horse, also, in the same barn, and this one he painted red, white and blue.

The next morning when Dr. Reed went to the barn, he did not know his own horses, and turned the painted one out as a stray. In a short time a man stopped and asked him if his big gray mule was for sale. This mule buyer was Eugene Field disguised so that Dr. Reed did not know him.

Injuring the horses in this way was a very mean act, and had this young man been more thoughtful at that time of what was right and what was wrong, he would have scorned the idea of doing such a thing. But bad deeds are remembered as well as good ones, and the only way to have people always think well of us is for us always to do well.

One of his favorite enjoyments was singing, and many a night the people of Columbia were aroused from their sleep by the sweet tenor voice of Eugene Field out with a serenading party.

When he studied no one knew, but he did not entirely neglect his lessons, for he always passed his examinations quite well. In an oratorical contest in which many students took part, he won the medal over all of them. He got fun out of this contest as he did out of everything else, for he presented a big wooden spoon in which he had written a humorous verse, to one of the young men who had been defeated by him.

It was while in school here that he learned to love the writings of an old Latin poet, Horace, and through his

knowledge of this old author, he gained for a friend the Hon. William E. Gladstone.

Nearly twenty years after Eugene Field's school days in Columbia, he visited the "Grand Old Man" at his home, Hawarden Castle, in England. They exchanged translations of Horace, and when Mr. Field left Hawarden, he carried with him as a present from Mr. Gladstone, the famous ax which this sturdy old man had used in chopping down trees in the forest near his home.

At the close of school in 1872 Mr. Field decided to spend a year traveling in Europe with Mr. Comstock, a college friend. They went to Mr. Comstock's home in St. Joseph, Missouri, for a short visit before starting on their trip.

A month was spent here in this pleasant family. These were happy, golden days to Eugene Field. Miss Julia, the second daughter, a sweet girl of fifteen, was his favorite companion. They soon became very much attached to each other and before he left for Europe he had succeeded in making her promise to become his wife sometime.

At the end of the month, after a fond farewell to his little sweetheart, he and his friend left for their European trip. Before they reached the Atlantic coast Mr. Comstock missed Mr. Field. He searched for him but failed to find him anywhere. He had no idea where he was, but his sister Julia knew, for he had come back to St. Joseph to see her again before he took his long journey.

Roswell Martin Field, Eugene's father, had been a noted lawyer, and had made quite a fortune. Eugene's share of this was sixty thousand dollars, but by the time he returned from his trip through Italy and France, little of all this money was left, though he had traveled but six months instead of a year as he had intended.

III.

NEWSPAPER AND LITERARY
WORK.

IT was a good thing for Eugene Field that his money was gone, for now he felt the need of having something to do. A friend advised him to try newspaper work, so he became a reporter on the St. Louis Journal. From St. Louis he went to St. Joseph where he was associate-editor of the Gazette. The next position he held was that of managing editor of the Kansas City Times. He afterwards took a similar position on the Denver Tribune.

In 1883 Mr. Field went to Chicago. Here he accepted a position on the staff

of the Morning News. The name of this paper was afterwards changed to the Chicago Record. He remained with this paper until the time of his death, editing the column in it known as "Sharps and Flats."

His newspaper work was not like other men's. There was a brightness and a humor in it that pleased everybody, and he soon became well known all over the United States. But his fame now rests mainly on his verses for children.

This man was always a child. He loved children and childish things, and enjoyed romping and playing as well as he did when a boy.

He himself loved "the little toy dog" and "the little toy soldier," so we find his "Little Boy Blue" loving them, too.

He knew the joys of a trundle-bed, so he tells us of the voyage to Dreamland of "Wynken, Blynken and Nod" in their wooden shoe.

He was always surrounded by dogs and cats and loved fancy pieces of china, so this is the reason he has told us such an amusing story of what a Chinese plate told him about a fight that occurred one night between a gingham dog and a calico cat. You will enjoy reading about them in the little verses entitled "The Duel."

Had he not sometime in his life been afraid of the dark, he could not have so well written "Seein' Things at Night," which tells us how a little boy felt and what he saw after the light was taken away and he was left alone in the dark.

The little poem entitled "Some Time" tells us how he loved his own children. Read this one, also, for it will help you to feel how much your father and mother love you.

One person writing about the help that came to people through Mr. Field's poems tells us the following story:—

"I came upon an old, white-haired man in the burying grouud of a Canadian village. He was reading, not his Bible, though it lay close beside, but a newspaper. He lifted a peaceful face to mine and said, in answer to my inquiry, 'I haven't felt so well since she left me as I do to-day. You see, I've been reading of another old grandfather who had to go on living a spell after he had lost his sunshine, and the man who wrote it—he

seems to kind of know—just—how—it feels.' And the tears fell upon the paper on his knee. He had been reading Eugene Field's poem, 'Telling the Bees.'"

Mr. Field very often received letters from children telling him how much they liked his verses, and, big-hearted man that he was, he answered the childish scrawls.

Once a little girl wrote and told him she intended to be just such a writer as he was, when she grew to be a woman. He answered her letter, telling her of all the beautiful things he could see from his window, of the birds and the flowers; and then ended by saying, "Now I must go out and shoot a buffalo for breakfast."

Do you not wish that you all might have had a letter from this man who knew

so well how to please children? As this, of course, is impossible, you may still learn very much about the kind of man he was, and what he has written for you by reading all of the poems which are spoken of in this story. You will also find many more pretty poems and stories for children in his books: "Love Songs of Childhood," "With Trumpet and Drum," "Little Book of Western Verse," "Second Book of Verse," "Little Book of Profitable Tales," and "The Holy Cross and Other Tales."

Perhaps Santa Claus may sometime bring you one of these books, and if he should do so, be sure to read it carefully.

At the time of his death Mr. Field was busily engaged in writing a book, "The Love Affairs of a Bib-li-o-ma-ni-ac." This long word means one who is very

fond of books, and the story tells us of the pleasures that come to one who loves to own books and read them.

IV.

HOME LIFE.

ON an October day in 1873 there was to be a wedding in St. Joseph. The guests had assembled at the church, the bridal party was waiting, the hour for the marriage was near at hand, but the bridegroom came not.

Some of his friends, knowing how forgetful this young man was, went in search of him; and where do you suppose they found him, and who do you suppose it was?

It was none other than Mr. Eugene Field, down on his knees in the dirt, set-

ting a quarrel between two little street urchins over a game of marbles.

The sight of his friends brought to his mind the thought that this was his wedding day, so he hastened to the church, where he was united in marriage with Miss Julia Southerland Comstock.

Their married life was a very happy one; for Mr. Field was a noble, kind-hearted husband, and Mrs. Field a good, faithful wife.

Mr. Field's most pleasant hours were those spent at home with his wife and children. To his wife he was a petted child who had to be carefully looked after, to his children he was an older brother whose sole aim was to make them happy.

He called his home at Buena Park, Chicago, the Sabine Farm; and his

study in this home, he called his "den." Could you have peeped into this room when Mr. Field was there, you would have seen a very tall, slender man with a sober, yet pleasant, face. Had he caught a glimpse of you, his deep-set, bluish-gray eyes would have beamed upon you so kindly that you surely would have entered the room where he was and have asked him about the wonderful things it contained.

You would have seen in this "den" all kinds of funny toys, dolls more than a hundred, dainty china dishes, queer old candlesticks, Indian relics, cases of butter-flies, cages of canaries, and souvenirs of noted men and women from all over the world.

The children's play room was often in his study, for he loved to have them

near him. He sometimes took the baby, put it in a big clothes basket, and let it play with toys which he fastened to the end of a fishing pole. He would write till he grew tired, then turn away from his desk and play with the children till he felt like working again.

He called all his children by pet names, as he had called his animal friends when a boy.

To others, his oldest daughter was Mary French Field, but to him, she was Trotty. The boys, Eugene and Frederick, were known to him as Pinny and Daisy, and the two baby children he called Posie and Little Sister Girl.

Once when some one asked Posie his and his little sister's names, he said: "My name is Posie, but my next name is

Roswell Francis Field; and hers is Little Sister Girl, but her next name is Ruth Gray. Sanders" (meaning his father) "always calls us Posie an' Sister."

On being asked what he intended to do when he became a man, he said: "Write stories like Sanders 'bout animals."

One day some one was reading aloud from a newspaper something about the "Child Poet." They wondered if Posie, who was in the room, understood who was meant by the "Child Poet," so they asked him. He looked vexed to think they would ask him such a simple question, and quickly replied, "Us—Sanders 'n' me."

Mrs. Field had to do all the managing for the family, for Mr. Field knew but one use for money, and that was to spend it

as fast as he made it. She loved her husband so well that she never learned not to entrust him with money.

Once she gave him fifty dollars which was to be used in paying the rent. He left the house fully intending to use the money as directed. But, going down the street, he met a man with eight cases of butterflies. In a very short time Mr. Field had the butterflies and the man the fifty dollars. Rushing home with them, he called out to his wife, "Never mind about that rent. I've got the finest collection of butterflies on the North Side." Mrs. Field merely said, "Dear me! Gene, where on earth can we put them?"

Another time she gave him twenty dollars to pay some bills, and you could never guess what he did with it. He

spent it for a little dog. He knew that Mrs. Field would think that the money had been spent foolishly, so when he reached home he lay face downward on the floor, and remained there till his wife came and asked him what had happened. He then told her what he had done, and begged her forgiveness. As soon as she forgave him, he got up and raced through the house with his new pet.

With all her cares and anxieties Mrs. Field did not lose her youthful beauty, or her sweet, loving disposition. No one was prouder of this fact than her husband, who loved to write her dainty little verses which told her these things in a very pretty way.

One summer Mr. and Mrs. Field went back to St. Joseph on a visit. While

there they were invited to a lunch party. Mrs. Field went with some of their friends, and Mr. Field was to come later. But he, left alone, thought of the old days when he was a youth, and she a maiden, and, forgetting all about the lunch party, he took a carriage and drove alone to all the places they had so often visited in the happy time of their love-making. One of these places called "Lover's Lane," he has told us of in a poem written when he and his family were in London.

No one ever loved a book more than Eugene Field. He called the New England Primer his first love.

One of his greatest pleasures was making collections of books. He spent so much money for rare old volumes that

he felt ashamed to tell his wife; so when he came home with a new book, he often told her that Mr. Flail, Judge Trask or Colonel Bisland had given it to him.

He soon had so many books obtained in this way that Mrs. Field felt very grateful to these unknown friends who had been so kind to her husband, and insisted on their being invited to the Field home to dinner. Mr. Field then had to tell her they were just "make-believe" people, and that he, himself, had bought the books.

But with all of Mr. Field's reckless use of money, and a desire to turn the house into a combined museum, menagerie and library, there was no happier home in all that great city than the one where was found Eugene Field and his wife and children.

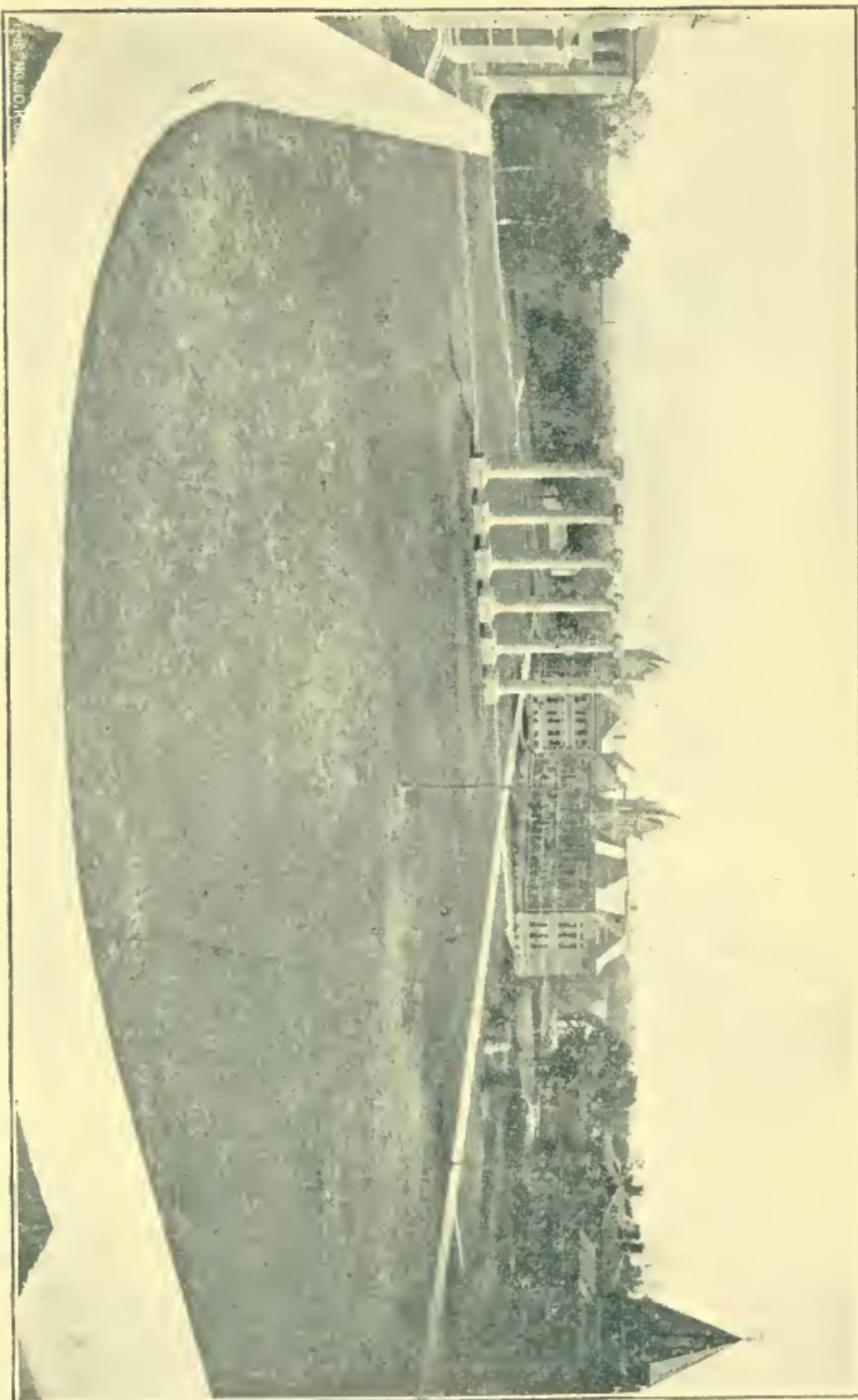
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V.

CONCLUSION.

DURING the last years of his life, Mr. Field became very popular as a reader of his own poems. He had an engagement to give a reading in Kansas City on Monday evening, November 4, 1895; but when the evening came, he was lying dead in his home at the Sabine Farm in Buena Park, Chicago.

He had been suffering from a severe cold for several days, but no one thought of his being very ill. After a pleasant evening spent with his family and a friend who had intended to go with him to Kansas City, he retired Sunday night



CAMPUS OF MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY.

feeling better than he had for some time; but he died from heart failure the next morning at 5 o'clock. He was buried in Graceland Cemetery, Wednesday, November 6.

The family had many friends who sorrowed with them, but none more truly so than the little poor children whom he had in some way befriended.

A little crippled boy, a stranger to the family, came before the funeral and asked if he might see Mr. Field. His request was granted, and he hobbled into the death chamber, where he stood pitifully gazing at the face of his dead friend.

A little girl, too poor to buy a flower, begged a yellow rose to take to Mr. Field, as a mark of her love for him.

The family, fully knowing which flower would be his choice, could he have selected it, chose this simple rose from all the beautiful flowers sent, and placed it in his hand as he lay in his casket ready for the tomb, thus forming a bond to the last between him and the children.

Mr. Field little dreamed that he would be compelled to leave his work while yet in the prime of life. He felt that his best days were yet to come. As he grew older, his writings became better, and had he lived to a ripe old age, as did Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant and Holmes, we surely should have had many more beautiful things from the pen of this poet, who knew so well how to touch our hearts.

Memorial services were held on Sun-

day, November 10, and the vast crowd which filled the hall and packed the street told how well Chicago loved Eugene Field.

During this service, the Rev. Dr. Bristol expressed the following beautiful thought:

“Some day, out in God’s acre, where angels sing their ‘Sleep, Oh, Sleep,’ a monument shall mark the resting place of our gentle poet; and let it be built, as was Daniel Defoe’s in London, by the loving, grateful contribution of the children of the land.”

Money is being raised by the people of Chicago for the purpose of erecting a monument, in Lincoln Park, to the memory of Eugene Field.

But Chicago is not alone in her efforts

to pay tribute to this sweet singer, for no place loves Eugene Field more than Missouri. She feels he is hers, also; for here he was born, here he finished his education, here he did his first newspaper work, and here he was married.

Since his death, the fourth day of November has been known as Field Day in Missouri, and memorial exercises are held by the school children. The boys and girls have given their pennies, nickels and dimes for a monument to be erected on the campus of the State University of Missouri at Columbia.

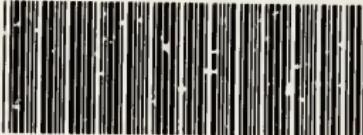
A fitting design for this monument would be a statue of Eugene Field with "Little Sister Girl" on his knee and "Posie" nestling by his side; while on the base should be the inscription—"Sanders an' me!"

When this monument is unveiled, it should be a joyous, as well as a solemn occasion, and one in which the bright faced boys and girls of our public schools could join in singing the songs and reciting the poems of their fallen comrade and friend; for these are the ones for whom this man loved to toil and sing.

May the sweet memories of Eugene Field's deeds of kindness and the beauty of his simple rhymes long be a blessing to the children of our free, happy land!

THE END.

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